

Wyoming gets \$150M to clean up abandoned coal mines

By Wyoma Groenenberg

December 16, 2011 --

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Wyoming was the top state recipient of an Abandoned Mine Land (AML) grant to eliminate health and safety hazards caused by past coal mining, getting just over \$150 million. Other top states are Pennsylvania, receiving \$67.2 million; West Virginia \$66.5 million, and Kentucky \$47 million.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) Director Joe Pizarchik announced yesterday that nearly half a billion dollars in grants for states and tribes were awarded. This year's funding — a \$90 million increase over last year — will generate more than \$1 billion in economic activity and support thousands of jobs nationwide.

Funding for AML grants comes from coal receipts and is distributed through a congressionally mandated formula under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act. Fiscal year 2012 grants will total more than \$485 million, the highest amount ever awarded.

"When our nation enacted mining reform in 1977, we made a simple and bold promise that the revenues from coal extraction today should help clean up the legacy of coal mining many years ago," Salazar said.

A recently issued Interior report estimated that the \$369 million in AML grants made available for fiscal year 2010 delivered an economic impact of \$1.1 billion and was directly responsible for more than 8,600 jobs.

With an increase of \$90 million over fiscal year 2011 funding levels, the economic impact of the \$485 million in grants announced today is expected to exceed that of last year's funding.

"OSM's AML grants announced [yesterday] will have a significant impact on the health, safety and economic growth of communities across the country," said Pizarchik. "With this and previous funding, our state and tribal AML partners will continue to produce a cleaner environment, well-paying jobs and stronger local economies."

OSM provides grants to 28 coal-producing states and tribes based on their past and present coal production. The bureau will make these awards throughout the current fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30. The \$485 million available in fiscal year 2012 caps a four-year phase-in of increased funding mandated by Congress in 2006.